

# Engineering the taming of flood and drought



## Somerset MLA – hero and visionary

In 1958, Queensland Premier Frank Nicklin officially named Somerset Dam to honour Henry Plantagenet Somerset, a prominent member of the Brisbane Valley community and Member for Stanley in the Queensland Parliament from 1904 to 1920. Somerset dispatched a rider to telegraph Brisbane with advance warning of the first of the disastrous floods of February 1893, repeating the action a fortnight later to warn of the third flood of that month. After the severe drought of 1899-1902, Somerset actively promoted a dam at Stanley Gorge with the dual purpose of flood mitigation and water storage.



## Engineering – 25 years of hard work

The 1931 Brisbane River flood, due largely to rainfall in the Stanley River catchment, revived interest in flood mitigation. In 1933, based upon research, planning and design by engineers W.H.R.(Bill) Nimmo and E.L.(Evan) Richard, the Bureau of Industry recommended the damming of the Stanley, 8km upstream of its inflow to the Brisbane River. A 1934 Act of Parliament established the Stanley River Works Board, chaired by engineer John (later Sir John) Kemp.

Construction started in 1935 on the township and the dam wall, providing substantial unemployment relief during the 1930s depression. Some 450 workers were employed during construction, and the township population exceeded 1000. Much of the township has been preserved and improved, providing accommodation today for scores of water sports enthusiasts.

Several eminent engineers made major contributions to the design and construction of the dam. Nimmo was Chief Engineer from 1934 to 1949, with his first Assistant Engineer for Design C.B.(Charles) Mott, who was later succeeded by E.M.(Mick) Shepherd. The first Resident Engineer for Construction was G.(Glen) Sheil, succeeded in 1941 by Evan Richard. R.deV.(Raleigh) Gipps was the last Resident Engineer, from 1948 to completion in 1958.



## Reliable water storage at last

By 1942, construction of the dam had advanced sufficiently to provide the Mount Crosby pumping station with its first reliable long term water storage for supply to the cities of Brisbane and Ipswich. Construction then ceased, with the work force diverted to urgent defence works during World War II. Work resumed in 1948 and concrete work was completed in 1953. Careful quality control of mix and placing of concrete has resulted in Australia's most leakage-free dam, and the dam incorporated cutting edge technology in the control of water release.

## Frequent flood menace addressed

This was the first major dam in Australia designed specifically to provide flood mitigation as well as storage for urban water supply. Soon after completion, the dam almost totally mitigated damage to Brisbane and Ipswich by the 1955 flood. The dam next demonstrated its capability in 1974, when, without its major mitigation of that Brisbane River flood, the catastrophic damage bill would have almost doubled.



## Green power – hydro-electricity

The small (4MVA) hydro-electric power station, commissioned in 1953 and connected to the South-east Queensland grid, is the oldest grid-connected hydro-electric station operating in Queensland.



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